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Ministry of Education

STRONGSTART BC CENTRE TO HELP KOOTENAY EARLY LEARNERS

CRANBROOK – East Kootenay MLA Bill Bennett joined Southeast Kootenay school board chair Keith Nielson, district staff, parents and caregivers today to officially open the Province's StrongStart BC early learning centre at Amy Woodland elementary.

"By working together with the school district and community, our government is helping to make sure that every Southeast Kootenay preschool child starts school with the skills they need to succeed," said Bennett. "This StrongStart BC centre will provide parents with the support they need to make sure their preschoolers enter kindergarten prepared and confident of success."

The StrongStart BC centre offers a free drop-in program for parents or caregivers and their children. Qualified early childhood educators will lead activities, including stories, music, and arts, to help children grow linguistically, physically and socially, and become comfortable in a school-like setting.

"More than 9,000 B.C. kindergarten students are not developmentally ready to start school," said Education Minister Shirley Bond. "StrongStart BC early learning centres will help make sure those students are better prepared. The centres are part of our plan to improve literacy skills so that B.C. children have the best possible chances of success in school and life."

The Amy Woodland Elementary StongStart BC centre will make use of underutilized space at the school. The district has partnered with the Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy, recipients of the first-ever Council of the Federation Literacy Award, and the East Kootenay Early Childhood Coalition to provide a range of early childhood services.

"As a district we are very pleased to be opening our first early learning centre at Amy Woodland elementary," said Nielson. "This centre offers a great opportunity for our early learners and parents to come together and learn from the centre's early educators and is one component of the district's overall commitment to supporting early learners and their parents in all our communities."

The Southeast Kootenay district received $40,000 to prepare the Amy Woodland elementary in-school space and fund this year's operating costs, including staff, supplies and healthy snacks. The school district is receiving another $30,000 for its second year of operation.

Recently, the Province announced that all of B.C.'s 60 school districts have been offered the opportunity to participate in the program. Almost every district plans to open one or more StrongStart BC centres to benefit families in their community. The Province is providing a total of $5 million for up to 80 StrongStart BC centres as part ReadNow BC, the new provincial literacy plan.

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The StrongStart BC centres help the Province reach its goal of making B.C. the best-educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent. Since 2001, government has invested over $106 million in new literacy initiatives, including pre-literacy and early learning programs such as $9.5 million to operate the kindergarten readiness program Ready, Set, Learn and $2.7 million for the ActNow Literacy Education Activity and Play (LEAP BC) program that encourages literacy, physical activity and healthy eating in preschool-aged children.

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